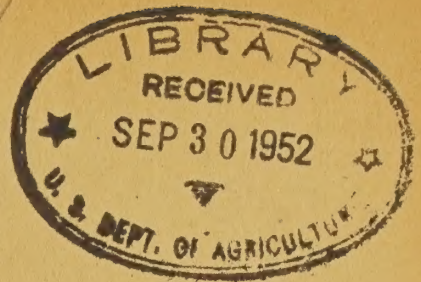


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Rural Electrification Administration,
Washington 25, D. C.

GROUP ORAL INTERVIEW DEMONSTRATION
USDA PERSONNEL OFFICERS MEETING

September 2, 1952.



The group oral interview has attracted widespread interest during the past few years as a new and effective testing technique for both appointment and promotion purposes. To improve the selection process under the REA promotion-from-within program, we have used this method of interviewing on a limited basis for the filling of certain types of vacancies where there are more than five qualified applicants and where the group interview would appear appropriate.

This type of interview has been used effectively by the Civil Service Commission, the New York State Department of Civil Service, the Washington State Personnel Board, the Colorado Civil Service Commission, and other state and municipal civil service groups.

The Civil Service Commission employed this technique successfully in examining candidates for this year's Junior Management Assistant examination. Many encouraging and enthusiastic reports on the effectiveness of this method of testing have been received.

With regard to the validation of the group oral type interview, shown below is an abstract from an article by A. G. Arbous and Joy Maree, entitled, "Contribution of Two Group Discussion Techniques to a Validated Test Battery." This complete article appeared in the April 1951 issue of "Occupational Psychology."

Group tests of the social interaction type have not been submitted to thorough-going validation study. Their use heretofore has depended on face-validity. The National Institute for Personnel Research included such tests in a battery of eight tests given to 219 applicants for the position of administrative trainee. Those given were: (1) the leaderless group discussion, and (2) the assigned leadership test. Assessors rated various personality and ability items during the progress of each of these tests. Assessors then put aside item ratings and, from a general impression, made a final over-all rating of the candidates. Agreement in ratings among assessors was high. Personality scores and ability scores showed a high correlation, indicating inability of assessors to distinguish between personality and ability items. A high correlation between the final over-all ratings and those based on personality and ability items suggests an over-all rating in lieu of the multi-item rating when time is an element. A significant, though not high, correlation was found between the group tests and standard mental alertness tests indicating that each has a place in selection for executive and administrative positions. In measuring validity of the test, the criterion used consisted of measures of the candidates' potential administrative ability after one year on the job as judged by his supervisors. The validity of the test scores was investigated by correlating the ratings of the tests with the criterion. In every case significant coefficients of the order of .3 to .6 were obtained,

showing all three ratings to be valid in terms of the criterion. In investigating the relative validity of the three ratings, the final overall rating gained the highest coefficient. It seems that the other two ratings do not make any contribution over and above that made by the final rating in predicting the criterion.

The general pattern of the group oral interview is to bring together five to eight candidates for a position. They are seated around a table and for an hour or more discuss among themselves assigned topics, some general, and some related to the occupational field for which the interview is held. A specific work situation or problem may be injected for discussion and solution by the candidates. Several observers or raters are arranged around the room in such fashion that they may see and hear. They take no part in the discussion and do not address each other or the candidates while the interview is underway. After the candidates are dismissed, the raters record their appraisal of each of the candidates.

There appear to be many advantages of the group oral interview over the individual interview. The group oral technique permits the appraisal of a number of personality factors and social skills not otherwise readily observed. Some of the factors best evaluated in a group meeting are initiative, tact, social awareness, leadership, cooperativeness, alertness to group attitudes, poise, and ability to speak effectively. This method of testing creates situations in which each candidate can demonstrate his possession or lack of these abilities by his interaction with the other candidates. Group oral candidates are under observation for a longer period than in an individual interview. A relatively relaxed atmosphere is created; usually there is a certain amount of tension in a personal interview. Group interviews will allow more candidates an opportunity to present their abilities for promotion consideration since individual interviews must necessarily be limited to only a few of the best qualified applicants.

As previously pointed out, group oral interviews have been used on a limited basis and are still in an experimental stage requiring changes and improvements. We have conducted several group oral interviews the results of which were encouraging. Continued improvement in methods and techniques is required as group interviewing progresses and more experience is acquired.

This interviewing procedure is not the only selection factor. Selection factors set forth in the REA promotion-from-within policy--education, experience, performance ratings, demonstrated ability to assume greater responsibility, attitude, interest and seniority within grade--will be followed. The interviewing aspect is the only change and will permit more interviews. In some cases, where desirable, the group interview may be supplemented by individual interviews. As usual, of course, applicants in the field or in leave status who are unavailable for interview are considered on an equal basis with those available for interview.

Procedure:

Briefly summarized, the steps in the procedure are as follows:

- a. The physical facilities are arranged so that the candidates are seated opposite each other around a table. No candidate is seated at either end.
- b. Name plates are desirable for ready identification.
- c. Observers or raters take seats behind the candidates where they may observe and record performance. They take no part in the discussion.

- d. One observer will begin the group interview by making comments regarding the vacancy to be filled pointing out the most desirable qualifications required for the job, etc. The introduction by this observer also serves as a method of placing the candidates at ease, relieving any tension, etc.
- e. Candidates describe briefly their qualifications and backgrounds for the benefit of all candidates and the observers.
- f. Two problems each of 30 minutes duration are presented to the group one at a time for group discussion.

Attached you will find a Personnel Bulletin advertising a vacancy as Administrative Officer GS-11 (Assistant to the Area Director). This bulletin includes the duties and requirements of the position for which these volunteer "candidates" are being examined. These candidates have made application for this vacancy and they have been screened and found to meet the minimum qualification standards.

Also attached is a temporary rating form which will be used by the observers in rating the candidates. You may, if you wish, rate the candidates as a guest observer. After the demonstration is concluded and the candidates are excused, each observer will discuss his ratings. This will make it possible for you to compare your ratings with those of the "official" observers.

Attachment

